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*Constructing a sense of community in rapidly growing European cities in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries**

The strong urban growth of cities in western Europe between approximately 1000 and 1300 C.E. resulted from important migrations. These were movements primarily from the countryside into nearby new population concentrations, but probably also from regions further away. Historians have paid little attention to the process of social integration which must have taken place in these rapidly growing urban communities. However, the lifestyle experienced by those in small rural communities, where various types of domain laws bonded serfs, differed fundamentally from that in the new havens of freedom. The character of urban economic activity made people less dependent on natural conditions and more on social constraints, as will be explored below. People coming from various backgrounds had to adapt to new types of work and community life. Habitation was more dense, the size of the community larger and levels of social interaction much higher although less personal. Social positions and relations were rather fluid; new roles and behavioural standards had to be developed. Given the variety of social origins of the new town dwellers, and the rapid changes consequent upon the continuing expansion, the early cities must have been melting pots in which the limits of the newly acquired freedom were probed through processes of adaptation and conflict. New social structures emerged with new laws, new institutions and a new sense of community. As historians, we are best informed about the steps by which new relations became formalized. I would like to draw attention to the phase before institutionalization and legislation, during which more informal social structures must have prepared the paths towards new urban ways of life. In the very first stage, 'a *particularized* trust in persons of known attributes or affiliations' needed to be created, before the urban elites and the community as a whole could expect to be acknowledged by a form of *generalized* trust attributed to strangers with whom transactions were to be made.[1]

In this article, I hope to show how trust networks emerged and became established in the cities of Europe between about 1000 and 1550 C.E. In my view, community building in the first stage of urban growth rested essentially on personal ties, formalized by oaths of loyalty. These were at the heart of the sense of belonging expressed in the first *communes*, the groupings which fought for their independence *vis-à-vis* the established feudal and ecclesiastical powers. As European cities grew, these networks needed to organize themselves as public institutions, which allegedly changed their character fundamentally. This transition process from personal ties to institution building deserves special attention as this was the time when new, unprecedented forms of social organization came into being. Particularized trust in people had to be transferred to institutions which initially were characterized by closure, admitting members only after co-optation procedures. In that stage, trust was differential. Only later, the uniform trust in institutions determined the rise of urban ways of life, capitalism and Western concepts of human rights. Therefore, it was required 'that one's transactions with strangers would be mediated by an impartial institutional framework that enforced property rights and legal contracts regardless of attributes of the contracting parties'.

Instead of taking an approach that focuses on concepts such as judicial categories, social class and market structures, I put forward the idea that trust networks can provide a better understanding of the emergence and further development of these European urban communities.[2] At the same time, I will examine the limits of the efficiency of personal trust networks, with regard to the scale of the organizations they were supposed to run, and the internal conflicts of interest which arose within and between cities, and between cities and states. The most general and effective form of trust network is kinship, which typically bound members of aristocracies, and

which surely also played a major role in the formation of urban elites. Property rights, transferred through inheritance and marriage, underpinned the dominance of kinship.[3] Within the Catholic Church, networks based on belief, lifestyle and education evidently functioned, within a relatively wealthy elite, on a very wide geographical scale. These networks were partly urban (dioceses, parishes and, from the thirteenth century onwards, the mendicant orders), but largely rural as they related to the traditional monastic orders. Trust networks were also present within aristocracies, in the form of kinship groups sharing a common chivalric lifestyle and of feudal bonds organizing groups of loyal armed followers. I will argue that the emerging cities of Europe were home to several new forms of trust networks which strengthened the social cohesion within as well as between these urban communities. However, in the thirteenth century, when the cities reached their medieval peak in population,[4] their sheer size and internal conflicts required institutions for which trust was no longer the self-evident basis of operation.

I will now discuss the types of trust networks which came into being successively within and between urban communities. They have been described by historians as distinct features, with various names in different cities, but the similarity of their internal structures and functional bases has not been drawn out. A first type of network that comes to mind is that of travelling merchants seeking protection within horizontal associations such as guilds and *hanses*. From the eleventh century onwards, when the cities were in their phase of rapid growth, these associations offered many opportunities to people from all sorts of social backgrounds. Inclusion and social mobility were vital factors which promoted urban expansion. The administration of the cities was firmly in the hands of the local *hanses*, membership of which was a prerequisite for holding public office as an alderman in Bruges and Leuven. Merchants' family clans and associations will be considered here as the second type of trust network – historians have described them mostly as patrician. However, a third type emerged when artisans began to organize themselves in confraternities and craft guilds and challenged the merchants' monopoly on economic, judicial and political power.

Religious confraternities continued to be created for purely devotional purposes, even if linkage with a particular church restricted them to a specific basis in a parish or quarter. In Italy, extensive trust networks of another type came into being as capital was accumulated on an ever growing scale. In north-western Europe, they first appeared from the thirteenth century onwards as families of 'Lombards' active in money-lending and other financial services. Joint-stock companies, with agents in nodal cities from Palestine, Egypt and the Black Sea to the North Sea, emerged in the fourteenth century. In regions where the landed aristocracy were resident in the cities, they introduced their organizational pattern based on kinship and clienteles, which in the urban setting created yet another type of trust network, that of the parties or even gangs struggling for local power.

At the same time, a different process led to the formation of consolidated states. Their traditional elites, belonging to the church and the aristocracy, merged into the new officialdom. In their midst developed a further type of trust network that overarched the older ones and grew steadily. Such networks were often formed in universities by students of specific nationalities. By this time, the older networks had already become exclusive and largely ceremonial. They were located mainly in cities, but the mobile networks of servants of the state no longer primarily served the interests of any particular city, although they may have mediated between cities and states. In the next section of this article, I will focus on the most urbanized regions in Europe from the eleventh to the early sixteenth century, concentrating initially on the southern Low Countries, one of the earliest to witness urbanization, but for which the available information is not easily accessible.

The successive types of trust networks emerged as and when they were needed, depending on the social and economic functions that individual cities fulfilled in their regions. I hope to clarify the ways in which the incipient urban communities succeeded in creating, almost from scratch, entirely new forms of social attitudes and relations. This question has not been adequately dealt with, even though its relevance is clearly apparent. Indeed, it is too easily taken for granted

that emerging urban communities displayed a spirit of solidarity and held common values from the very outset. Not only does this seem highly unlikely in view of the rapid migrations that occurred and the frequent use of violence reported in the early cities, but successive versions of urban privileges clearly demonstrate the urgency of the need to impose new norms. These generally aimed at the internal pacification of the urban community and the external protection of its members. The norms changed incrementally as they emerged over the centuries, under the influence of measures taken to address urgent practical problems. There were no historical models or theoretical blueprints to fall back on in dealing with the challenges which these growing urban communities had to face in western Europe from the eleventh century onwards. Consequently, the outcomes of this incremental process varied greatly from one place to another. The formation of largely autonomous urban communities was a relatively new phenomenon in world history. The level of urban autonomy and self-governance, combined with the protection of the rights of individual citizens and their property, are generally seen as the key elements which drove economic growth and particularly the development of commercial capitalism. This approach ultimately goes back to Max Weber's fundamental reflections about the specificity of the Western city.[5] This is what distinguishes the urbanization process in medieval Europe from anything which had gone before, and sets it apart from the earlier developing cities of Asia.

What did it mean in the first stage of urban growth for a landless labourer or serf to run away, trying to escape the limitations on his personal freedom but at the same time giving up the protection which his lord had provided for him within a domain structure? The earliest urban charters of liberty dealt with this matter. The oldest in the Low Countries is that of the town of Huy on the river Meuse, dating from 1066. Several articles deal with the position of serfs who had fled their domain to go to work in the towns. If the lord of the domain came to demand his return and was able to prove his case, he could require the serf to continue performing his traditional duties for him.[6] This situation may have prevailed for some time in predominantly rural areas, but larger urban communities soon bought off the rights by which the landlords still limited their personal freedom. This was already the case before 1100 in places where the local lord was a bishop or an abbot, as in Cambrai, Utrecht, Tournai and Nivelles. In the eleven-tens, the larger cities of Arras (1111), Ypres and Douai followed suit. In 1067, the count of Flanders wanted to attract inhabitants to his newly founded town of Geraardsbergen, strategically located on a hill on the border with the duchy of Brabant. He did this by promising independent jurisdiction to the aldermen. Freedom from judicial interference by landlords meant a solid guarantee for the inhabitants of new towns, which would probably have been preferable to protection from their landlord. A further step was to ensure the legislative authority of these aldermen. The oldest documented right to create new urban law was granted to the small town of Aire-sur-la-Lys between 1093 and 1111. In 1127, the larger cities of Bruges and Saint Omer made clear that their support for a candidate count would depend on his recognizing their right to modify their local customary laws in accordance with their needs. However, all this did not yet imply that all inhabitants of these cities would be considered as free men. Louis VI (1098–1137) of France first orally granted personal freedom to citizens if they had been residents in a city for at least a year and a day, a right that was acknowledged by his successors. In England, the oldest mention of such a right was in 1155, while in the Low Countries it first appeared in the foundation charter of the harbour town Nieuwpoort, dating from 1163. As in Geraardsbergen, a century earlier, rulers granted new privileges in the hope of seeing their own foundations grow.[7]

The unity of jurisdiction and legislation, and later the equality of personal freedom, must have resulted in some degree of homogeneity, social cohesion and law and order within the cities, where masses of disgruntled migrants came together. Moreover, the urban liberties created relatively small, isolated areas within a wider rural world still firmly dominated by feudal powers. Looking at the content of the oldest urban charters, the most general concern was that of the preservation of peace by sound jurisdiction, if necessary against everybody, including the count himself. The citizens saw themselves as being united in defence against a world where violence was omnipresent. In the charter for Saint Omer, dated 1127, the newly inaugurated count even recognized the sworn *commune* of the city, which had formed the core of the movement against all

kinds of feudal restrictions. Citizenship was thus acquired on the condition of swearing an oath of loyalty to the community, which implied the observance of rules.

The aldermen strove to limit violence within the city walls by ruling against fighting and feuding, and by imposing restrictions on foreigners, who had to leave their arms at the city gate. The secularization of law was a primary concern of merchants. In 1114, the 'sworn commune' of the commercial city of Valenciennes accepted the testimonies of two 'men of the peace' as sufficient evidence in legal cases, so long as those testimonies coincided. Only when these were not available were traditional proofs such as immersion in cold water employed. In 1116, the burghers of Ypres were granted the abolition of the judicial duel within their walls. In 1127 and 1128, Saint Omer was granted the privilege to refuse judicial dues during the fairs of Flanders, a privilege extended in 1173 to all Flemish merchants in Germany. Not later than 1164, testimony under oath by two members of the commune was granted as evidence in all matters in Arras and Saint Omer.[8] Criminal justice grew increasingly detailed and was aimed at controlling private violence through the prescription of peace-making procedures. Breaking a sworn peace was heavily fined.[9] The years of urban revolt against Count William of Normandy in 1127 and 1128 provided great opportunities for the enlargement of urban privileges. At the same time, events reported by a number of chroniclers, especially Galbert of Bruges, show that varied social backgrounds underlay strong antagonisms. These led to serious fights within the cities as well as in the countryside, since various clans held different views concerning their legal and social position, particularly with regard to serfdom.

Before cities had written charters, the core of cohesion among citizens was laid down at the level of the social elite, which consisted mainly of merchants. Their wheeling and dealing required various forms of organization to protect their vital interests in a world which was still dominated by feudal powers. The oldest documents informing us about the self-organization of travelling merchants designate their associations using terms such as *amicitia*, friendship, guild and *hanse*. The merchants of Valenciennes on the River Scheldt established a *caritet:* a charity or confraternity. In their statute, dated between 1050 and 1070, love of God, the observance of common religious services and solidarity among all brethren formed the basis of this group. The confraternity arranged funeral and memorial ceremonies for deceased brethren, and the membership fee was used in charitable works for mutual support as well as for other inhabitants. Banquets and drinking parties, *libations*, were held to foster a sense of community. All of these niceties were inspired by the material need for this solidarity group: members had to travel safely to markets, and being armed and in a group was an effective way to protect and support each other. Conflicts between members had to be mediated by the others in the confraternity.

Similar statutes have been preserved from the merchants' guilds of Saint Omer and Arras, both situated in the county of Flanders, dating from 1072 and 1083 respectively. They are more explicit about the settlement of conflicts arising after too much drink. The deans of these associations not only dealt with warranties for the members; they were even granted jurisdiction over the citizens. The gradual transition from private associations to public authorities is apparent in the charter for the *amicitia* of Aire-sur-la-Lys, dated before 1111. Twelve judges from their midst ruled over the town, applying laws which they were entitled to amend themselves. The 1127 charter for the city of Saint Omer extended certain privileges exclusively to the members of the merchants' guild. It granted them the freedom not to pay tolls, and the revenue from the local mint was assigned to the maintenance of the guild.

One can thus conclude that in the eleventh century civilized behaviour needed to be rigorously imposed upon the merchant elite through compulsory adherence to an association. They performed charitable works, presided over religious ceremonies and convivial meetings, and mediated conflicts between members. This socialization created the solidarity needed to protect trade beyond the city walls. In the course of the twelfth century, merchants took the lead in forming what would become the public authority in the cities, and restricted certain material and judicial privileges to themselves. Their associations clearly functioned as trust networks, essential for the organization of the urban communities and for trade between cities. The events of 1127 and

1128 show, however, that the merchants' position was still heavily challenged by segments of the aristocracy, including the count.

Which new judicial regulations needed to be developed to enable the economic activities which would bring about ongoing and self-sustained urban growth? Apart from showing a concern about peace and justice, urban charters abounded with advantages granted to the citizens of a particular city, such as freedom from paying tolls or taxes. Litigation concerning commercial affairs was only possible before the local aldermen, who where the experienced specialists in these matters. Their jurisdiction needed to be fast and efficient, so they introduced evidence only on the basis of sound testimony by trustworthy fellow citizens. In the 1127 charter for Saint Omer, we come across the concept of trust among some citizens who needed a quick settlement of disputes in relation to their trade, especially in cases of debt. The sworn *commune* thus formed the basis of a trust network, whose members were exclusively eligible for public office in the city. Their relations facilitated commercial transactions, and gradually their network extended to the government of the cities. The sometimes ferocious resistance by the feudal powers against the emerging *communes* helped to foster their cohesion, based on oaths of allegiance and reliability; the external threats strengthened the internal solidarity.

As soon as urban magistrates had seen their autonomy and legislative powers recognized, including their exclusive judicial competence over the burgesses, they strove to support the economic interests of their core group, that of the associated merchants and entrepreneurs. Personal freedom, the guarantee of property rights and secular jurisdiction by one's peers were at the centre of this endeavour. A case in point is the abolition of trial by ordeal, as first documented in the charter for Ypres in 1116. Further steps were the restrictions on the use of private violence and the protection of private property against confiscation. Mediation by experts came to replace the reliance on irrational factors for the settlement of conflicts. Urban charters steadily began to contain exemptions, extended to entire territories, from tributes, tolls and other taxes charged on trade. Standardization of the quality of products, measures, weights and currency was also a major concern.

The physical protection of travelling merchants and their goods which had first been organized by their private associations was now taken over by the cities' public authorities. They concluded treaties with foreign rulers in order to ensure the security and trading facilities of their citizens abroad. This implied that urban magistrates could also undertake diplomatic action in cases of a violation of their citizens' rights. If disputes could not be settled by negotiation, urban magistrates would decree retaliation against the subjects of the foreign authority, as a way of pressuring them into being more lenient. The arrest of merchants and the confiscation of their goods was ordered by municipalities. However, such measures often triggered an escalation of the conflict, which then lasted longer and caused further damage to economic relations. As a result of this, individual cities sought alliances with cities which had similar trading interests in order to extend the level of protection and increase their capacity to counteract harm. Originally, these urban leagues were private organizations set up by the merchants themselves. Depending on the flow and extent of urban development, public authorities took over this role and the principalities were to become the framework of their organization – as happened in the county of Flanders in the course of the thirteenth century.[10] The most prominent late example of such a transition is the German Hanse, which emerged as an association of merchants and did not become a league of cities until 1356, continuing to operate beyond the territories of the relatively weakly developed monarchic states in northern Germany.

Even if the merchants' interest groups managed to organize themselves at a supra-local level, the diversity and fragmentation of urban judicial spheres severely limited their capacity to protect their citizens beyond their own walls. The most extraordinary system of regional protection that developed in northern France and Flanders in the twelfth century was that of the fairs. These were initiated by local authorities trying to attract merchants from abroad by offering them protection, not only in the city where the fair was held, but also along their journey. It was the co-ordination of a calendar of fairs throughout the year in a region protected by a single powerful ruler that created huge economies of scale. Fairs held on set dates improved the capacity to plan

transactions in the long term, increased the intensity and speed of information exchange and thus considerably reduced transaction costs. The counts of Champagne were the undisputed champions of this new regional system of fairs which linked northern and central Italy through northern France, including Paris, with the cycles of fairs held in Flanders and southern England.[11] The Lille fair is the oldest documented event in Flanders, mentioned in 1127. Yearly cycles developed in the course of that century and it became possible for merchants to plan journeys travelling from one fair to another, and from one region to the next. Increased revenue from local duties, dispute settlement and coinage were profitable for the authorities. The merchants appreciated the stabilization of the conditions protecting and facilitating their trade, which thus became more profitable.

These regular and predictable meetings brought about the development of international trust networks. About 8,000 contracts drawn up at the fairs of Ypres during the second half of the thirteenth century have been preserved and reveal regular transactions between merchants from Italy, England, Flanders and France. Flemish merchants made agreements in Ypres to finance future fairs in the Champagne cycle with partners from England and Italy. This trust network now extended to the whole of western Europe, and commercial credit became the foundation of all transactions from Italy to England via Champagne and Flanders.[12] Trust flourished under the protection of the local and regional judicial authorities, but probably even more through the sanction of exclusion which could be imposed by the highly profitable trust networks.

From the mid thirteenth century onwards, artisans in the most industrialized regions in Italy and the Low Countries started to organize themselves, following the model of the merchants' guilds. Cities then reached the peak in their demographic growth and became exclusive. Their confraternities, similarly, were embedded in religious ceremonies such as funeral and memorial services, the cult of a patron saint via an altar or a chapel, and processions. Charitable care for sick and elderly members, as well as for their widows and orphans, was also copied from the merchants' guilds, as were the communal dinners. As the large industrial towns like Arras, Douai, Ypres, Ghent and Bruges became increasingly divided by class conflicts, the merchants and entrepreneurs who monopolized the city administration strongly opposed the evolution of artisans' confraternities into professional corporations supporting the social and economic interests of a particular sector.[13]

Class conflicts, friction with other, mutually-exclusive professional groups' common interests and rituals, residence in the same neighbourhood, and incorporation in urban militias as a distinct entity behind their own standard – all of these factors served to foster a sense of community within the craft guilds. In the cases where they acquired a share in the city's government, such as in Flanders after 1302, relations between the members shifted from mutual trust and charitable support vis-à-vis common enemies towards the sheer defence of material interests. Some of the largest corporations in the textile sector numbered several thousand members, at which point the concept of a trust network can no longer be applied. [14] Entrepreneurial patterns based on putting-out and subcontracting undermined the alleged equality and brotherhood among the guild members. Nevertheless, it has been suggested for Paris and other European cities from the late middle ages to the end of the *ancien régime* that 'most trades were organised around complex networks of informally constituted co-operative arrangements involving varying combinations of partnership, patronage, and clientage'.[15] Evidently, the role of the corporative movement was essential in the formation of urban communities, especially in those where up to two-thirds of the labourers worked in an export industry such as textile manufacturing or beer brewing .The growing complexity of urban society was stabilized by its corporative structure; each of its components found its origin in a trust network.

Most of the craft guilds were labelled initially as religious confraternities celebrating the cult of a patron saint and performing charitable works. As such, patrician governments could not suppress them, so long as they did not openly act as professional organizations. After the official recognition of crafts in Flanders and Liège in 1302, and several decades later in other principalities, confraternities continued to flourish as purely devotional associations. Apart from a

single case linked to the Benedictine abbey of Saint Peter, the oldest foundations in Ghent go back to the second half of the thirteenth century, and their number increased steadily in the course of the following centuries.[16] The growing popularity of the Corpus Christi devotion, as well as the various qualities of the Virgin Mary and other saints, strongly fostered cults focused on a particular altar in a given church. Members would sponsor the cult and participate in the saint's celebrations, including masses and processions. This more emotional and individualized devotion became increasingly popular from the fourteenth century onwards.[17] Membership lists show that prominent personalities, including individuals from princely families, supported such confraternities, whose members were mainly recruited in a particular quarter or parish. Their socially mixed composition may have counterbalanced the divisions manifest in late medieval urban societies as a consequence of the frequent and often violent clashes between patricians and craftsmen, between various crafts, or between opposing clans and parties. There can be no doubt about the networking function of such organizations.

The system of international fairs described above was one of the many contexts in which another type of trust network operated, namely, the companies of merchants from cities in northern and central Italy. In the mid thirteenth century, they became apparent in contracts under the name of a particular family based in a particular city, along with their partners. The Lombards, as they were called, appeared in north-western Europe from the thirteenth century and gradually became more deeply embedded in local communities. Not only did they develop financial services such as money-lending, money-changing and bookkeeping, but in the first half of the fourteenth century, they also acquired high offices as receivers or mint-masters for the princes of Brabant and Flanders. They took root through intermarriage with local elites and typically operated as family networks within various cities and principalities, no doubt to spread the risks which they evidently incurred.[18] Joint-stock companies grew from family associations into larger organizations attracting other investors and agents. They sent their junior partners as representatives in various locations, as well as to the major fairs. Given the large scale of the operations and the huge investments and risk involved, trust must have been the basis of these commercial companies, which extended their network from one Italian city throughout the peninsula, around the Mediterranean and into western Europe. Family ties formed the basis of these trust networks, while other shareholders and agents were bound by the high professional standards of these companies. New accounting techniques such as double entry bookkeeping guaranteed permanent control of transactions. Agents abroad had to keep close contact with the headquarters through the regular transmission of letters and bills of exchange.[19]

Not all cities and towns were dominated by merchants, nor did craft guilds generally participate in politics. These relations obviously depended on local development as an export-oriented economy of a substantial size. And even in northern and central Italy, where this was clearly the case, the balance of power between the merchant class and the aristocracy, living in the cities as well as in the countryside, was more complicated. Venice may have been the clearest case of a merchants' republic, but in most land-locked cities the rivalry between popes and emperors, from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, dragged the aristocracy into the formation of antagonistic clans.[20] Their conflicts continued to dominate political culture, even beyond the original controversies, as the parties absorbed and reoriented all controversies in the urban community towards their own goals. Mutual exclusion from power and banishment of the losers from the city perpetuated the tensions and exported them into the countryside. This pattern has been described for Italian and Catalan cities as well as for the those of the northern Low Countries.[21] Fundamentally, parties and clans were based on the loyalty of family bonds. Their appearance seems bound to the presence of the aristocracy in cities, which introduced there types of power struggle and organization based on clienteles. Their extension brought the inclusion of friends and clients whose social status may have been much lower. Parties were rather vertical organizations, in which differences of social class were superseded by the sheer struggle for power. Divisions typically led to polarization when rival claims to the throne were supported by different segments of the aristocracy, whose followers constituted themselves as sworn leagues or parties. In

Friesland, it was the absence of a central authority which left power in the hands of the richer peasants, who grouped into parties when external pressure threatened their 'freedom'.[22]

The final type of network discussed here, that of state officials, mainly recruited citizens as experts in the centralization of statecraft. An early case is that of Castile where urban oligarchies were dominated by the *caballeros*, the lower nobility resident in the cities and living off their landed properties acquired during the *Reconquista*. Their military service for the king and counts brought them spoils of war. From the twelfth century onwards, they represented the cities in the *Cortes*. Through this accumulation of power, they could restrict the political weight of merchants and craftsmen.[23] While state personnel had traditionally been recruited from the clergy and the aristocracy, from the fourteenth century the growth of central institutions attracted university-trained lawyers and financial specialists from urban origins. Exposure to the prevailing aristocratic values would suggest that burgesses devoted their skills less to urban development than to the strengthening of state domination over the cities. On the other hand, states increasingly used their supremacy to appoint officials in the cities and gradually extend their powers.[24] Recent studies of the composition of territorial courts in the Low Countries have revealed the gradual retreat of the aristocracy from legal and financial affairs, concentrating their interest instead on the highest political, military and representative offices. Lower noblemen, closely intermarried with patricians, took over the administration, and remained sensitive to influences from their local networks.[25] Regular meetings of representatives of the major cities with government officials to negotiate fiscal, military, judicial and administrative matters facilitated close contacts, which were often accompanied by the exchange of gifts.[26]

This was the period, after 1300, which the late Larry Epstein characterized as one of cities' 'institutional inefficiency', as a consequence of 'jurisdictional fragmentation' and the 'parcellization of sovereignty'.[27] In my opinion, his interpretation of 'freedom and growth' is only correct from the viewpoint of public institutions. On that level monarchical states indeed often proved more efficient than regional states under urban hegemony – they balanced countervailing powers within larger territories. However, one should not overlook the lasting cases of Venice, the United Provinces and the Swiss Confederation. Nor should the efficiency of monarchies be overestimated. Until the end of the sixteenth century, the complex balances between cities and states left room for mutual bargaining and support, as well as for hostilities and increasing state domination. Urban elites, seated in the nodes controlling territories, often negotiated private privileges, including control of the countryside, in exchange for financial, military and strategic services.[28]

In this article, a number of trust networks have been observed and classified into types. Each of them fulfilled particular functions in a specific period of the development of cities. Proximity facilitating frequent personal contacts, situations of open competition or even of repeated external threats were the most favourable contexts in which to see trust networks actively engaged in social change. Some of them lost their functions over time. Merchants' associations were at some point able successfully to civilize their companions, to organize their collective self-defence, to secure protection for their members during their journeys as well as privileges from consolidated states, and to negotiate with foreign authorities on trade regulations. From the fifteenth century onwards, protection, jurisdiction and negotiation about trade relations increasingly became concerns with which territorial states claimed to deal. However, private corporations of merchants continued to take care of these primordial issues in regions where states were weak, as well as on the maritime routes beyond the jurisdiction of any state. One may think of the chartered companies which organized most of the colonial trade until the early nineteenth century. Internal pacification and the generalization of the rule of law by the sixteenth century led, in most European cities, to the extinction of armed conflicts between private gangs or parties who took the law in their own hands. However, even today the weakness of state power in southern Italy and eastern Europe still gives this phenomenon contemporary relevance.

In most cases, the local merchants' guilds had to give up ruling their city exclusively. The arbitrariness and abuse of power by their monopolistic governments from the thirteenth century

onwards led to revolts which triggered the intervention of territorial rulers, who then imposed a division of power among contending factions.[29] From a structural viewpoint, one may also argue that cities had simply grown too large and had internally become too diversified to be ruled by a merchants' trust network. Institutions and professionals took over and created a more formalistic type of government in which countervailing powers were kept in balance. Cities may still have been ruled by oligarchies, but these could no longer function on the basis of trust networks alone. A similar argument applies to the craft guilds which, by growing and getting involved in some forms of local government, became formal institutions applying rules rather than relying on mutual trust between their prominent members. Roberto Michels's iron law of oligarchization fully applied to guilds and crafts. The same can also be said about the trust networks which, in the early stage of state building, could act as mediators between cities and states. However, the growth and professionalization of state bureaucracies increasingly limited their impact. State officers gradually became recruited more on the basis of merit than of friendship and trust. This mechanism equally applied to trading companies: the larger they became, the more they had to develop as formal institutions applying rules.

Obviously, these tendencies are far from absolute: even in the present day, trust networks play a role, even in large organizations. What we can observe is that various types of trust networks were essential in transitional stages, before the formation of new institutions: they fostered a sense of community among particular groups in the emerging cities; they helped to create systems to protect and regulate regional and international trade; they were at the basis of systems of social security and the defence of workers' rights; they functioned to soften social antagonisms by organizing people from different classes around local religious cults; they were at the core of joint-stock companies operating on an intercontinental scale; and they were intermediaries between aristocratic, municipal and state power systems. In all of these situations, trust networks were needed to create new activities and social relations. Once these communities became successful and grew, they required institutionalization and the trust networks were reduced to possibly influential but no longer determining organizations. The originality of the medieval commercial trust networks continued to create freedom as well as growth, at least for their privileged members.

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* This article is a revised version of the plenary lecture delivered at the Anglo-American Conference of Historians on 'Cities', University of London, 3 July 2009.

[1] I am applying here the conceptual framework expounded by Sheilagh Ogilvie, 'The use and abuse of trust: social capital and its deployment by early modern guilds', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, i (2005), 15-52, esp. pp. 17-20.

[2] The concept of trust networks has been introduced to this field of study by Charles Tilly in his 'Cities and states in world history', *Theory and Society*, xxxviii (2009/10). This article was also published there in an abbreviated version.

[3] See the classical study by F. Blockmans, *Het Gentsche Stadspatriciaat tot omstreeks 1302* (Antwerp, 1938), 64–97.

[4] P. Clark, *European Cities and Towns: 400–2000* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 25, 37, 116.

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